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ABSTRACT

Numerous research studies have been conducted concerning the negative aspects of grading: the low correlations between academic success (high grades) and later vocational or professional success, possible sadomasochistic motives of teachers in awarding grades, and grade assignment resulting from the teacher's sense of duty or responsibility to authority with little tempering by humane feelings. However, studies have also shown that grading can be a benevolent activity in a creative atmosphere which both develops students' feelings of self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence and fosters close, accepting, and trusting student-teacher relationships. (JM)

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GRADING AS A SADOMASOCHISTIC ACTIVITY OR AN EROTIC BENEVOLENT ACTIVITY?

Larry D. Tjarks

In a review of the research on "College Grades and Adult Accomplishment," Donald P. Hoyt says that only two of forty-six studies illustrated positive correlation between grade-point average and vocational success.[1] Of twelve studies relating college grades and teaching success, "neither over-all college grades nor grades in specific courses were significantly related to any measure of teaching success" (p. 71). Similar studies indicated no significant correlation between academic success and vocational success in engineering, law, journalism, government, and scientific research. Six unusually thorough and sophisticated studies in medicine revealed these results: "undergraduate grades are unrelated to any measure of success or performance; medical school grades are related to measure of over-all success for young physicians; [but] for experienced physicians, no measures of academic performance are related to the quality of professional functioning" (p. 71). Last year at the 4 C's workshop on grading, Barret Mandel's reference to Jonathan Warren's investigations also substantiates that undergraduate grades do not correlate with career success. Granting that these studies may not prove the utter uselessness of grades, they do clearly challenge

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the utility of the degrading grading process, and why these challenges have gone relatively unchallenged may reveal some significant hidden agendas. If giving grades does not prepare students for adult success, what are we doing when we give grades?

In his controversial essay, "The Student as Nigger," Jerry Farber sees a sadomasochistic relationship between teachers and students, and he sees grading as a sadistic activity:

> Your neighbors may drive a better car; gas station attendants may intimidate you; your wife may dominate you; the State Legislature may [exploit] you; but in the classroom, by God, students do what you say--or else. The grade is a hell of a weapon. It may not rest on your hip, potent and rigid like a cop's gun, but in the long run it's more powerful. . . . The teacher . . . flogs his students with grades, tests, sarcasm and snotty superiority until their very brains are bleeding.[2]

In Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye, Holden's history teacher flunked him, and the degrading justification the teacher gave prompted Holden to observe: "He put my goddam paper down then, and looked at me like he'd just beaten hell out of me in ping-pong or something."[3] Putting the paper down and the ping-pong paddle may suggest flogging, and surely the flunking and degradation reveal the teacher's hidden sadistic motives. In Summerhill, A. S. Neill also observed sadism in some teachers: "Teachers sometimes show cruelty by being supercilious and sarcastic. Such teachers expect to hear roars of laughter from their pupils when they

thus torture some poor, cowering child."[4]

Neill, Salinger, and Farber make me wonder whether getting good grades measures masochistic tendencies and whether giving poor grades measures sadistic tendencies. Many of us no doubt can recall enough obsequious gestures on the path to good grades and degrees to make the masochistic question easy to ask, but how many of us can entertain the possibility that "high grading standards" hide sadistic motives? Since both Havelock Ellis and Wilhelm Stekel tell us about the complimentary and interdependent natures of sadomasochism,[5] grade getting, grade giving, and the academic pecking order may unconsciously gratify hidden sadomasochistic needs. The hidden agenda of sadomasochism may also help explain our resistance to change a degrading, yet gratifying, grading process.

Whether or not the grading process gratifies sadomasochistic needs can, perhaps, only be answered by each individual for themselves; nonetheless testimony from writers, teachers, and educators about the presence of sadomasochism in teachers makes A. S. Neill's explanation of the cause of sadism worth considering: "The cruelty of many children springs from the cruelty that has been practiced on them by adults. You cannot be beaten without wishing to beat someone else. . . . Every beating makes a child sadistic in desire or practice" (pp. 269, 271). Of course, I do not accept one cause explanations of sadism or any other

phenomenon, but while preparing these remarks, I wondered about how many practicing teachers suffered corporal punishment as children. Does childhood corporal punishment create self-hating and sadistic teachers as adults? I could find no data on the question, but in view of the undoubted sadism of some teachers, perhaps those of us who were beaten as children should ask ourselves what we have done with the sadistic desires that those beatings created.

There may be relevant hidden data in Arthur T. Jersild's When Teachers Face Themselves. Jersild does not approach the relation between corporal punishment and sadism directly, but his data on teacher's reactions to authority and their lack of freedom to feel anger, may reveal a cause for sadism. Eighty-nine per cent of the teachers surveyed indicated frustration in their attitudes toward authority and eighty-four per cent indicated a lack of freedom to feel anger.[6] Since beatings come from parental authority figures, and since anger that naturally results from being beaten can be repressed by more beating, perhaps the frustration that eighty-nine per cent of the teachers felt toward authority and their repressed angers, partially resulted from hidden childhoods of corporal punishment.

Jersild's data also revealed that fifty-five per cent of those indicating frustration toward authority desired help in understanding their relationship to authority, and such a desire to understand seems incompatible with hidden

sadism. Stanley Milgram's recently published Obedience to Authority also discounts the role of sadism in teaching-learning relationships. As you may know, Milgram wanted to determine "when and how people would defy authority in the face of a clear moral imperative."[7] The procedure involved a teacher and a learner who participated in an experiment that allegedly endeavored to determine the effects of punishment on learning. The teacher who was unaware of the experiment's real purpose administered shocks for wrong answers to an informed learner who faked pain in response to the shocks. The shocks ranged from fifteen volts to 450 volts, and increasing the voltage increased the learner's moans to shouts and screams and finally, silence. In one series of experiments, all forty teachers administered no less than 300 volts of shock before defying the experimenter's authority, and sixty-five per cent of the teachers administered the maximum severe shock of 450 volts. After 330 volts, the learners ceased screaming and pleading and became deadly silent, yet seventy-five per cent of the teachers continued to administer severe shock when encouraged by the authoritarian experimenter. One teacher reportedly said, "So what if he's dead, I did my duty." Often teachers did show considerable discomfort in doing their duty, and Milgram insists that the teachers did their duty out of a sense of obligation to authority, and not out of sadistic tendencies. When teachers could freely choose the levels of shock, they

tended to chose the lowest shock levels even though the higher shock levels could have legitimately been chosen, yet when prompted by authority to the most severe shock levels, their sense of duty overcame their reluctance to administer pain. Very often the teachers' strain in administering pain disappeared completely when they could abrogate their responsibility to the authoritarian experimenter.

The impact of Milgram's experiments for the grading process seems twofold. First, we, as teachers, may be more bound by our sense of duty than by our humane feelings. Second, we may be too willing to abrogate our personal responsibility for the grading process to authority figures like the Chairperson, the dean, or even the state legislature.

If we must function as authoritarian grade givers, we should consider the possible hidden agenda that A. S. Neill observed: we must be obeyed only to satisfy our desire for power. Postman and Weingartner also discovered the desire to control and tyrannize as honest answers to the question why are people teachers? They recommend psychotherapy as one means for uncovering our hidden reasons for teaching. My hidden reasons have been partially uncovered by Everett Shostrom's Man, the Manipulator: The Inner Journey from Manipulation to Actualization. Actualization therapy makes me more able to move from manipulative exploitation, mistrust, misuse, and control of myself and others as things to actualizing spontaneity, trust, art, and freedom in myself

and others as persons. For me the journey from manipulation to actualization means moving from self-rejection to self-acceptance, from self-hatred to self-esteem, from self-depreciation to self-appreciation, and from self-pity to self-worth.

As an actualizing teacher, then, I can be relatively free from enslavement to sadomasochistic tendencies, from obligatory servility to authority, and from manipulative power needs, thus I can more creatively respond to such research findings as those discovered by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson in Pygmalion in the Classroom: Teacher Expectation and Pupils' Intellectual Development. Some of you may know the pygmalion effect as self-fulfilling prophecy, and many of you may know that Rosenthal and Jacobson discovered that teachers' expectations dramatically effect students' performances. In the Oak School experiment, teachers believed that about twenty per cent of their students were late bloomers who would show unusually high academic progress. In reality, the experimental group of students had been selected at random, and the experimental group varied from the control group only in teacher expectation. In several experimental groups, the high teacher expectancies created average IQ gains of 15 points per pupil over the control group children.[8] Rosenthal and Jacobson's discovery of self-fulfilling prophecies stimulated much controversy and a spate of experiments, and while not all experiments

produced the same results, Rosenthal recently reported that 84 out of 242 different experiments yielded statistically significant evidence that teachers' expectations do effect students' performances. Rules of statistical significance indicate that chance could account for only 12 of the successful 84 studies, so teachers' prophecies and expectations have a significance of seven times greater than that of chance.[9] So far as I could discover, none of these studies dealt directly with teacher expectations and grading prophecies on improving composition skills, but I see no reason why a first set of graded themes might not have a self-fulfilling prophetic effect in producing students' final A, B, C, D, and F grades. Why no, or so few, specific studies have been made on the Pygmalion effect on student communication skills makes me wonder once again about those hidden agendas of sadomasochism and power.

The Pygmalion effect lives, nonetheless, and the experiments on self-fulfilling prophecies have additional clear implications for the grading process. When experimenters had negative expectations on processes like rating neutral photographs for allegedly discernable characteristics of success or failure, experimenters who expected failure ratings got failure ratings (Rosenthal, p. 58). In another negative expectancy experiment, teachers who had been given allegedly dumb rats experienced twice as many failures in teaching maze running skills than those teachers who had

the allegedly smart rats (Rosenthal, p. 58). For obvious ethical reasons, experiments have not been conducted on negative teacher expectations on students, but the above studies suggest that we should be extremely cautious of and very aware of our potentially negative expectations for remedial and failing students; moreover it would appear that giving D's for inferior performance, and F's for failing performance could create spirals of negative prophecy that might plunge students into deadly self-destructive cycles of inferiority and failure.

In "The Trial," a rising young American poet named Gary Gildner creates the penetrating pathos of the Pygmalion effect:

> Betsy took two groups of rats
> and kept their bellies full.
> But to one she also gave her lips
> in song, touched their flanks
> and on occasion played them
> warm gay tricks to which
> they responded by licking their paws.
>
> For the second group she suffered
> nothing gay--they stayed
> in the cellar, never knowing
> her touch, her song, nor
> the games she played.
>
> In the end she nailed them all
> to her laboratory wall,
> and counted the time
> by a special clock.
> The unloved died soon, to a rat,
> while the petted,
> proving their will to endure,
> held on, kicking for days.[10]

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As Gildner so ironically and poignantly portrays, the interaction between experimenter and subject makes an enduring difference unto and until death. Experiments identify increased teacher praise, encouragement, and satisfaction toward high expectancy students as causing the enduring Pygmalion effect.[11] Predictably, those studies also indicate a near disappearance of disapproval, criticism, and dissatisfaction in teachers' interactions with their high expectancy students. Those studies confirm what Carl Rogers observed in Freedom to Learn: "The facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner."[12] Rogers specifically identifies those facilitating interpersonal qualities as prizing, accepting, trusting, empathizing, and understanding. The experimental data and Rogers' findings send me groping for words like personal compassionate caring concern; moreover Rogers' discovery that those facilitating interpersonal relationships lack the desire to judge and evaluate throws us headlong into the dilemma that the grading process imposes on the compassionately concerned teacher: how can we judge a beloved student's performance at all, and worse, worst of all, judge it as average, inferior, or failing? Is it any wonder that students so often write with so little ego involvement and feeling? Who of us has the ego strength to expose our inner most feelings to judgments of average,

inferior, or failing? In his stimulating and inspiring "Teaching Without Judging," Barret Mandel confirms those feelings: "Since I have stopped grading the written work of my students, the papers I have received are more interesting to read than before, more personally worth my while, more informed with the kind of human presence I can respond to."[13] Mandel also discovered that "the more a student feels that the environment is safe for personal thinking and feeling, the less tentative become the contributions, the more accelerated the momentum, the profounder the insights and self-satisfactions" (p. 626). Mandel's efforts at resolving the dilemma of suspending grading judgments and the hierarchial demands for grades has lead him "to grade entirely, though flexibly, on a quantitative basis, rather than a qualitative one" (p. 628). Although hostile hierarchial pressure forced him to modify the quantity grading approach, one could speculate that Mandel's magnimity might tempt him to a little fabrication for the sake of a large truth: non-judgmental and non-evaluative facilitation frees a student to develop self-confidence, self-determination, self-discipline, and self-esteem.

Fabrication, however, may not be the only resolution to the dilemma of demanded judgment and the need for non-judgment. Toni Clark Thornton has described a successful program that suggests a possible solution to the dilemma.[14] Although not dealing with the judgment non-judgment dilemma

directly, the program focused on ways to develop students' self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence. The program strove to diminish and abolish the teacher as an authority with all the answers and all the power. Students got a sense of self-worth by participating in the choice of readings, procedures, and topics. Gestalt exercises encouraged students to discover their inner feelings and fantasies as worthy of self-expression. By fostering close, accepting, and trusting interpersonal relationships, students could accept evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses in their writing skills without fears of inferiority and failure. Apparently, accepting and trusting interpersonal relationships can facilitate such sufficient student self-worth and self-esteem that the student can freely reject or accept evaluation as useful or useless in his own self-determined development. Here, then, I finally see a possibility of grading as a benevolent activity, not a manipulative benevolence that hides expectations of gratitude, nor an arrogant benevolence that hides superiority feelings for filling the needs of both the giver and receiver, but Pygmalion's erotic benevolence that gives so that both the giver and receiver may grow creatively, bloom beautifully, and blossom eternally.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Educational Record, 47 (Winter, 1966), 70-71.

[2]The Student as Nigger: Essays and Stories (New York: Pocket Books, 1970), pp. 95, 97.

[3]The Catcher in the Rye (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), p. 12.

[4]Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing (New York: Hart Publishing Co., 1960), p. 271.

[5]Havelock Ellis, Studies in the Psychology of Sex (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Co., 1928), III, 159; Whilhelm Stekel, Sadism and Masochism: The Psychology of Hatred and Cruelty, trans. Louise Brink (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1929), I, 57.

[6]When Teachers Face Themselves (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1955), p. 164.

[7]Obedience to Authority (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 4.

[8]Pygmalion in the Classroom (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968), p. 75.

[9]"The Pygmalion Effect Lives," Psychology Today, 7 (Sept. 1973), 59.

[10]First Practice, (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1969), p. 40.

[11]Pamela C. Rubovits and Martin L. Maehr, "Pygmalion Analyzed: Toward an Explanation of the Rosenthal-Jacobson Findings," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 19 (1971), 197-203; Donald H. Meichenbaum and Kenneth S. Bowers, "A Behavioral Analysis of Teacher Expectancy Effect, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 13 (1969), 306-316.

[12]The Freedom to Learn (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1969), p. 106.

[13]"Teaching Without Judging," College English, 34 (Feb. 1973), 628.

[14]"An Alternative Freshman English Program for Minority Students," College Composition and Communication, 23 (Dec. 1972), 365-370.